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SIPDIS

NEA/PD FOR FRANK FINVER

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [KMDR](#) [OPRC](#) [IS](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: SHARM TERRORISM CONDEMNED: EGYPTIAN MEDIA THEMES, JULY 25

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1. Summary: The Sharm El Sheikh terrorist attacks on July 23 dominated Egyptian media coverage the following two days (reftel). All commentators condemned the attacks. On July 25, some TV and print press commentators began to question why the attacks occurred and who was behind them; then engaged in a blame game tagging the Egyptian government, security forces, the lack of reform, and U.S. policies in the region. Several PA contacts suggested that Israel might have been behind the attacks. Most commentators offered solutions to stop terrorism e.g., increasing reform and opening a "national dialogue" to stop terrorism. Before the attacks, Egyptian media coverage was largely concerned with the Israeli-Palestinian issue, with commentators urging Palestinians to support Abu Mazen and demanding that Israel complete its withdrawal from Gaza. End summary.

2. The terrorist bombing attacks in Sharm El Sheikh dominated Egyptian news coverage July 23 to 25. The government-controlled media covered the July 24 anti-terrorism demonstrations in Sharm El Sheikh, with large front-page photos of the demonstrators appearing in both of the leading pro-government dailies, Al-Ahram (circulation: 750,000) and Al-Akhbar (circulation: 800,000). Condemnation of the attacks continued on TV and in the print press. On July 25, some commentators began to assign blame to the Government of Egypt, security forces, Al-Qaeda, or the U.S. Government; some commentators advocated "fighting back"; and a good number asked such questions as who benefited from the attacks? Why now? What was the cause behind the attacks? (Comment: A surprising number of PA contacts asserted that many Egyptian reporters believe that Israel may have been behind the Sharm attacks, pointing to rumors that vehicles with temporary license plates from Taba a town near the Israeli-Egyptian border had transported the explosives used in Sharm. "How else could all of that explosive material be brought into Egypt, except from the Israeli side of the border?" claimed one contact. End comment.)

3. Many current affairs commentators suggested ways to prevent further attacks. "National dialogue is the best way to overcome terrorism," asserted the Chairman of Al-Azhar's Committee for Religious Dialogue on Channel 2's popular program Al-Bayt Baytak ("Make Yourself at Home") on July 25. "Handling these attacks aggressively will lead to the emergence of a new generation of terrorists," warned a well-known Islamic scholar on Dream TV's "Ten P.M." program on July 25, adding "The solution required is more democracy, more freedom, more justice." A columnist writing in independent daily Al-Masry Al-Youm (circulation: 20,000) on July 25 claimed, "We should fight domestic terrorism by implementing reform immediately." The same day, an Al-Ahram commentator called for the government to deal with extremist groups through dialogue, "not just through security measures." Another commentator in Al-Akhbar on July 25 advocated rebuilding destroyed property in Sharm "as soon as possible to send the message that life will win."

4. Israeli-Palestinian issue: Before the attacks in Sharm, the media was concerned largely with the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Secretary Rice's talks with both sides received lead coverage in Al-Ahram on July 23. The Mufti of Egypt was interviewed the same day in Al-Ahram. In reply to a question about the Israeli-Palestinian struggle, he stated, "Resisting occupation in all its forms but not killing innocent civilians is a legitimate form of jihad." Nearly all commentators appearing on TV called on Palestinians to support Abu Mazen, and on Israel to re-deploy its army from Gaza. A commentator in Al-Akhbar on July 23 warned that Israel "is hoping for a Palestinian civil conflict to limit its Gaza withdrawal and reject the Roadmap."

JONES